

Opening of Medical Sciences Building, University of Victoria
Premier Gordon Campbell
December 10, 2004

Check Against Delivery

It's great to be here today to see the entire B.C. Life Sciences project come to life with the opening of the Medical Sciences building at the University of Victoria.

This project hasn't come to life because of any one person. It has come to life because of literally thousands of people who've been working to bring this project to fruition.

I want to take a moment to say we wouldn't have been able to accomplish what we have without the leadership, guidance, perseverance, and commitment of the Deputy Premier, the Minister of Advanced Education, Shirley Bond. She's done an exceptional job for all of us. Thank you very much, Shirley.

Shirley would be the first to tell you that without the ongoing commitment to service and improvement and long-term planning that we've seen from Colin Hansen, as our Minister of Health, this would not be happening. Colin has been a leader not just here in British Columbia, but a leader across the country, as we expand not just the training and education for doctors and physicians but also for nurses and other critical members of our health services in British Columbia. He has truly been a great force for positive change, and I want to say thanks to Colin as well.

We are joined here by a number of members, MLAs, from Southern Vancouver Island who are particularly committed to the expansion of educational opportunities up and down the Island and across the province. I do want to take a moment to say thanks to them. They've all been incredible supporters and cheerleaders for this project.

We are part of, and have watched, the largest expansion of post-secondary educational opportunities in British Columbia in 40 years.

In 1963 Victoria College was transformed into the University of Victoria, and U Vic has been successful because of its great faculty, students and leaders. People like David Turpin and your chancellor have always remembered that our main goal is to provide the best possible quality of education to students at U Vic.

Victoria is leading British Columbia in a number of ways. As we look at where we want to go, we should recognize what we've contributed and what the University of Victoria has contributed.

Currently UVic generates about \$1.5 billion in economic activity a year. You support 10,000 jobs in the region while all providing the best quality of education, and bringing out the best in each of our students that come to this place.

Right now you are involved in a major leading-edge, international research project with the \$300-million NEPTUNE project which will map the ocean floor of the Pacific Rim. It is something that is breaking new ground; it's creating new knowledge; it's exploring new frontiers. It's happening from right here.

What we wanted to do when we looked at the potential for the B.C. Life Sciences Centre is recognize there's got to be a way that we build on the strengths of our various institutions as we move forward in British Columbia. The B.C. Life Sciences Centre is a way for us to do that. The B.C. Life Sciences Centre is a way of bringing doctors and nurses and dentists and medical researchers all together in a way that's linked, that's networked, that's communicating to one another, because we know there are great synergies that come out of that linking and that networking.

The B.C. Life Sciences Centre is a \$134-million project to almost double the number of physicians we train in British Columbia. We've added almost 2,000 new nursing spaces in colleges and universities across the province.

But in spite of your great record and leadership, you have never educated a physician at U Vic, and it's time that changed. I am very pleased to say that that is changing.

I was particularly pleased to be here today with a first nation leader and to be part of a first nation prayer, because one of the things we're going to do in British Columbia is we are going to make sure that first nations people in British Columbia have the same quality of health care as every other British Columbian. That will require each of us to think differently and provide those services more effectively.

We're here today to open a \$12-million Medical Services Building. It is a great building - 4,400 square metres of classes, labs, electronics and computer technology, which is going to connect medical students across the province. It's going to connect a medical student at UNBC to a medical student at U Vic to a medical student at UBC. It's going to bring together all of the talent and expertise we have in delivering a new standard of quality in British Columbia's medical schools.

Students from UNBC and U Vic and UBC will have the same lectures, go through the same learning experience, and participate in learning in a way that's not just positive but productive. U Vic's program will be focusing on one of the most important areas of change we're confronting, that is: geriatric medicine.

The demographic wave of aging is sweeping across not just our province but our country and our continent.

When you think back, the population in British Columbia grew by 50 per cent between 1980 and 2001. The number of physicians that we trained in British Columbia did not grow by one person in that same period of time. The new Life Sciences program will train over 120 new MDs on a regular and an annual basis.

We launched this idea in 2001. We were elected, and within two months we said yes, that's something we want to do, and within five months we had a \$134 million budget in place to do this.

This project has been built between 18 months and a year faster than people would have initially anticipated. The first medical students are arriving on our doorsteps and in your lecture rooms and classrooms this year, 2004. In January they'll start to coming to U Vic and UNBC. Four years from today they will graduate, in 2008. They will then have two years of residency in communities all over Vancouver Island. Only then, in 2010, will they be fully qualified physicians, at work in hospitals and communities all over our province. So from the day we decided we were going ahead with the plan, to the day we get the benefit of your investment, it will be almost ten years.

Over that period we know all of us are going to change. As Shirley pointed out, I will be ten years older, but so will everybody else in the province.

It's anticipated over the next 20 years the population on Vancouver Island will increase by 20 per cent, but the Island population over 65 will increase by 75 per cent. The older we get, the more demands we put on the health care system.

Frankly, as we build new technologies and new pharmaceuticals, it's clear that we're going to be able to improve people's quality of life as they get older. It's also clear it's going to cost us a little more money to do that. At the same time, we want to be sure we're at the leading edge of providing care and services. Yesterday we announced a \$35-million investment in new equipment.

The new CT PET scan facilities we're putting in at the B.C. Cancer Agency will scan people for their cancers. It will tell people not just where a cancer may be, but they'll be telling us what the cancer may be and how they may be able to treat it. Today's new students will be conversant and understand this new technology.

Just five years ago it took one hour for one PET scan. Because of new learning, research, and expertise amongst our health care professionals it now takes seven minutes for a more effective scan than just five years ago.

We have to keep pushing the edge of that knowledge. We have to keep pushing the edge of that research so that we can provide better care to our patients throughout the province and across Vancouver Island.

This facility, as part of the B.C. Life Sciences Centre, is at the leading edge of providing care for people in our province.

On behalf of all of the province of British Columbia, let me say thank you to everyone who has had the commitment, vision, and drive to bring us to here today. It's an exciting time for us in the province, and for the University of Victoria, and I want to say how much I appreciate you asking us all to be part of it. Thank you very much.

